

politically correct. And just last year, the United States ranked 37th in the world in math—what a disaster.

But here is the worst of all. The U.S. Department of Education recently introduced a rule that would direct millions—millions—of taxpayer dollars to schools that promised teaching critical race theory and the 1619 Project for American history and civics.

Put aside for a minute that these theories have been routinely debunked by historians and actively seek to divide Americans on strict racial lines. Critical race theory's central belief is that the law and legal institutions of the United States are inherently racist—so racist, they believe, that these institutions cannot be redeemed and must be completely replaced. The goal should be to have better laws and better application of those laws, not to tear them down.

For pushing this, it is not about uniting our country, it is about fanning the flames of the unfortunate human tendency to divide and separate into different tribes instead of uniting us around a set of common morals.

Shouldn't we be fighting that impulse to divide into groups against each other? I think we need to do more uniting, and that should start in our schools, which is why I cannot believe that the U.S. Government is spending taxpayer dollars to teach our kids to dislike our country. How low have we sunk? These ideas are designed to drive a wedge between Americans based solely on their skin color. They openly reject the goal of the United States of liberty and justice for all.

Our schools should be places that encourage the open debate of ideas and teach important morals to our young people so that they know right from wrong. That is why I joined Leader MCCONNELL and 38 of my Republican colleagues to send a letter to Education Secretary Cordona, urging him to withdraw these divisive grant programs. Part of our letter reads:

Families did not ask for this divisive nonsense. Voters did not vote for it. Americans never decided our children should be taught that our country is inherently evil.

Secretary Cordona should redirect these grant dollars to American history programs that teach the ideals and morals that have made the United States the greatest force for good in human history.

I spent my career in education—40 years. I have seen firsthand how a quality education can put a kid on the path to success in our great country, regardless of their race, religion, or economic background. When done right, education is the key to freedom. But the education we see in many schools today is just cementing existing inequality rather than giving kids the chance to escape it.

We have got a clear trend here: undermine border security, undermine the election system, undermine the Supreme Court, undermine the Senate, undermine our education system, un-

dermine our country. If your goal is to deconstruct and completely reshape a country, these are the steps that you would take.

Our country is not perfect. There is a lot we have got to work on. But here in the United States of America, citizens have freedom and opportunities, and that is what we need to be focused on, not giving handouts, not dismantling our institutions but creating opportunity.

We have the ability to make it better. We have the rules to do so. Those rules are in place so that all of us can respect, if not always agree with, the changes that are made to make this country better. That is called democracy. But changing the rules to force one's vision on everyone isn't democracy; it is tyranny. My Republican colleagues and I will continue to stand against that. That is what America was founded on, after all, and it is what America needs now.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF ANDREA JOAN PALM

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President and colleagues, very shortly, the Senate will vote on whether or not to advance the nomination of Andrea Palm to serve as the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. I strongly urge the Senate to support this nominee because Ms. Palm knows every nook and cranny at the Department. I will tell my colleagues, there is experience, and then there is Andrea Palm's experience.

During the Obama administration, Ms. Palm served in multiple senior roles at the Department of Health and Human Services, including serving as the Department's Chief of Staff.

She also served in the White House as a senior adviser on the Domestic Policy Council. Very importantly, she has played a particularly strong role in looking at policies to tackle the pandemic. She served recently as the head of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. That put her on the frontlines against COVID-19. There she was a coalition builder. She brought together the State government, the healthcare sector, public health experts, and more to protect the people of Wisconsin and save lives.

She led a collaborative effort to build the State's testing and contact tracing program. And thanks to her hard work, Wisconsin, on a number of particulars, has moved ahead in the country on vaccinations.

Ms. Palm started her career in social work, helping vulnerable kids and their families during times of crisis. During her Finance Committee hearing, she talked about how that experience set her on a path toward public service and how it is going to help her when she returns to the Department of Health and Human Services.

She also mentioned a story that I thought was particularly relevant in these days of polarized government.

She mentioned that former Secretary Burwell put her in charge of what was called the common ground agenda. Secretary Burwell knew that Ms. Palm brought people together, Democrats and Republicans, to tackle big challenges.

She said—and I note that there is a senior member of the Finance Committee here, our colleague from Texas. She said to our committee that the common ground agenda is the perspective she is going to bring to the Department. You can sure sign me up to that proposition because there is a lot that needs to be done, as my colleagues know, when it comes to big healthcare challenges.

I mentioned Ms. Palm is going to have to hit the ground running when it comes to the pandemic response as one issue. And my colleague from Texas knows, we are in the middle of a transformation of Medicare.

Back when I was director of the senior citizens—the Gray Panthers, Medicare was an acute care program. If you broke your ankle, Medicare was there for you. If you had a horrible case of flu, Medicare was there for you. Madam President and colleagues, that is not Medicare today.

Today's Medicare is chronic disease, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and strokes. Millions of seniors have two or more of these conditions. In 2017, the Finance Committee, on a bipartisan basis, led the passage of the Chronic Care Act, dealing with modernizing Medicare, and we are very much looking forward to working again on a bipartisan basis with Ms. Palm and Secretary Becerra because there is a lot to do here, particularly as it relates to traditional Medicare.

My colleague and I know together, because we have worked on these issues, that Medicare Advantage has really moved forward on many of these particulars, and we have got a lot to do on traditional Medicare. Ms. Palm is going to be instrumental in that effort.

We also know, on another issue the Finance Committee is dealing with—that millions of Americans feel that they are getting mugged when they walk up to the prescription drug counter at their pharmacy. It is long past time for the Congress to step up and act to bring down the cost of people's medicine. The Senate Finance Committee has worked in a bipartisan way on that. There are other approaches that I support, particularly giving Medicare the authority to negotiate and hold down prices. But we can work together in a bipartisan way on prescription drugs.

Finally, there is an enormous agenda ahead of us in terms of major issues surrounding mental health care. I was given a report by the GAO just a few days ago that really highlights how we have seen so many people falling between the cracks in the mental healthcare system as a result of the pandemic; you know, rural seniors, for example, young people who perhaps are

facing learning challenges. They haven't taken to remote learning. The law says that mental healthcare and physical healthcare are supposed to be treated equally, but based on this GAO report that was just given to me a few days ago, that is not the case.

So that is just a handful—a handful of the major issues that Ms. Palm will have on her plate. It is critically important that we have all hands on deck there. This is a person who knows the Department front to back.

When we vote here in a bit, with respect to advancing her nomination, I hope that the U.S. Senate, on a bipartisan basis, will vote for a proven healthcare leader, somebody who is committed to expanding and improving healthcare, who really understands the nuts and bolts of building healthcare coalitions in America.

I see the Presiding Officer of the Senate who has been involved in this work in her State, the State of Illinois. We need these top-notch individuals who have been willing to serve, who are experts in their fields. That is what makes Ms. Palm so qualified for this position.

I support her nomination fully. I urge my colleagues, when we vote this afternoon at 5:30, to advance this important nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

DOMESTIC MANUFACTURING

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, this has been a tough year since COVID-19 became a global pandemic. There are many lessons to be learned from this pandemic. One of them that jumps out at me as being abundantly obvious is the real-world consequences of vulnerable supply chains.

We almost began to believe, because cheap consumer goods could be made in China or someplace overseas, that that was the optimal arrangement. And certainly consumers in America have benefited from low prices when it comes to a number of things that are not made in this country. But some of the things that we depend upon, whether it is for public health or to keep our economy going or for our national security, are dependent on vulnerable supply chains.

Perhaps the easiest one for everybody to identify with was the shortage of personal protective equipment. I remember when I called my Governor in Texas, he said: Two things you can get us—more PPE and more testing.

Well, we produce so much testing capability now you don't hear much about that. But it was true that our hospitals needed masks, gloves, gowns, and ventilators to keep our frontline healthcare workers safe as well as other patients. At one point the situation became so dire, when it came to personal protective equipment, that first responders asked the public to help boost their supplies. They welcomed donations of N-95 masks from folks who had extra boxes in their garage or gloves from hair salons that

had closed their doors. We didn't reach that point because of the lack of preparation by those hospitals or healthcare workers but because of our reliance on other countries to produce that essential medical gear.

China, it will surprise no one, is a major supplier of PPE. And since much of their stock was sent to hot spots in the earliest days of the pandemic, including in Wuhan, we were left to rely on the relatively small number of domestic manufacturers here in the United States.

But I am here today not to talk about PPE but another supply chain breakdown with far-reaching consequences, and this time it is semiconductors. While semiconductors are something that perhaps most people are not intimately familiar with—but let me put it this way: Anything that has an on-off switch involves a semiconductor.

They are the underlying technology in our most used products, things like cell phones, computers, cars, televisions, dishwashers. That is right, just about anything with an on-off switch. These are small integrated circuits that keep getting smaller and smaller and smaller, which means you can put them on a device like this; whereas, in the past, you may recall, Madam President, I remember the first cell phones that came out looked like a brick, but because semiconductors got so much more sophisticated and so much more powerful, you can put hundreds, perhaps thousands, of them on a device like this. These chips are necessary not just for consumer products but for other things as well, like the cell towers that keep us connected and the advanced weapon systems that support our national security. Even ventilators at hospitals require semiconductors.

In short, we need semiconductors for our most prevalent and critical products, but the vast majority of chips are no longer made in the United States. Taiwan dominates semiconductor manufacturing, and one company, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, virtually controls the market. Last month, TSMC accounted for more than half of the total foundry revenues. Foundries are the manufacturing facilities that make semiconductors. Companies in Taiwan control 63 percent of the global market.

Well, you don't have to look very far to see what a supply chain breakdown might look like because currently we are getting a taste of what it is like to not have access to the semiconductors that the U.S. economy needs. Right now, the demand for chips far exceeds supply. There is a global shortage of semiconductors that is creating serious impacts in nearly every industry, from consumer electronics to national security.

Texas is home to companies across a whole range of affected industries, and last week, I was able to sit down with leaders from a few of those companies in Dallas to learn more about the impact of this shortage.

We heard from a Hewlett Packard executive about the difficulties this has created in consumer electronic manufacturing covering a whole gamut of products.

An executive from Raytheon, a national defense company, talked about how a steady supply of chips is important to our national security. These tiny technologies, these tiny circuits help support American warfighters around the globe.

We know now that the auto industry is among the hardest hit, and I heard from leaders last week from General Motors and Toyota about how their companies are coping. Chris Nielsen from Toyota said that when he first started with the company, you could count the number of chips on a given vehicle on two hands. That is certainly not the case today. Think about all the high-tech features in cars these days—navigation devices, Bluetooth, automatic braking, backup cameras, and a variety of sensors. All of those depend on semiconductors, and that is on top of standard features like power steering, electric windows, air-conditioning, and windshield wipers. This adds up to dozens and dozens of chips for the various components of a single vehicle, and that supply is getting harder and harder to come by.

At the beginning of the pandemic, automaker suppliers predicted a drop in car sales and canceled existing chip orders. Semiconductor manufacturers replaced the auto chip capacity with other in-demand things like personal computers for kids learning at home or more ventilators to use with COVID-19 patients. But Americans kept buying cars at the prepandemic level.

Unfortunately, the shortage of semiconductor manufacturing capacity and the long lead time for chip making has meant a shortage of chips that will likely last through the summer for the auto industry, and it has forced many auto makers to slash production because they simply don't have enough chips, and they are laying workers off. Some have shifted production to focus on the most in-demand models, while others removed some of the tech bells and whistles.

But the impact goes far beyond the options available on a car lot. For every production or assembly line that is cut, there are hard-working men and women who lose their jobs, as I said. As a reminder, this industry reaches across virtually every business and every national security company in America—automotive, consumer electronics; everything from the F-35, our fifth-generation stealth fighter, down to your cell phone, agriculture. Some of them even power children's toys.

Well, there is a clear problem with this vulnerable supply chain, and the question is, How do we fix it? How do we solve it? When we faced supply chain shortages at the start of the pandemic, companies of all types began to shift their manufacturing to help alleviate some of the strain. Distilleries